



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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District of Arizona*

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## **OSCAR NUNEZ-MEDINA SENTENCED TO 120 MONTHS FOR HIS PARTICIPATION IN MARIJUANA GROW OPERATION IN THE COCONINO NATIONAL FOREST**

PHOENIX – Oscar Nunez-Medina, 41, was sentenced in Federal Court this morning to 120 months of confinement by the Honorable James A. Teilborg, for his participation in a large marijuana growing operation. A multi-agency task force made up of local, State and Federal law enforcement eradicated the marijuana which was growing in the Coconino National Forest. The sentencing was for Nunez-Medina's participation in one of three separate grow operations eradicated in the same area of Arizona since July 24, 2005. Nunez-Medina was arrested while cultivating marijuana in the Calf Pen area. The Calf Pen grow operation contained more than 19,000 plants and was valued at more than \$30 million. It was one of the largest growing operations of marijuana ever found in Arizona.

The investigation culminated from a joint investigation by the Gila County Violent Crime, Narcotic and Gang Task Force (comprised of the Arizona Department of Public Safety and the Gila County Sheriff's Office), the U.S. Forest Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Coconino County Sheriff's Office, and the Flagstaff Police Department. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Southwest Region Special Operation Response Team consisting of National Wildlife Refuge Law Enforcement Officers also conducted surveillance activities and supported the take down of the marijuana grows.

Co-defendants Jesus Castillo-Malendrez, 31; Gerardo Manzo-Pulido, 19; and David Valencia-Gonzalez, 28, all of Mexico, are awaiting sentencing.

Last summer U.S. Attorney Paul K. Charlton said of this operation, "This was a monumental investigation and operation requiring and achieving the highest levels of cooperation from federal, state, and local officials. I applaud the exhausting efforts and professionalism exhibited by all these agencies in such an undertaking."

"The large scale cultivation of marijuana on public lands is an increasing concern for the Forest Service," said Robin Poague, Forest Service Southwest Region Patrol Commander. "From armed farmers posing a hazard to people out recreating to wide-scale environmental damage including large amounts of trash in our wilderness areas, these operations are a threat to the public good."

Gila County Sheriff John Armer stated that "This investigation demonstrates the success of the federal grant programs that provide funding for federal & state task forces statewide. In Arizona, those funds are administered by the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission." Roger Vanderpool, Director

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of the Arizona Department of Public Safety, added that, "I am proud of the accomplishments of the Gila County Violent Crime, Narcotic and Gang Task Force. This operation is an excellent example of how the cooperation among law enforcement agencies can impact the flow of illegal drugs into the communities of Arizona and throughout the country.

DEA Special Agent in Charge Timothy J. Landrum stated, "Law enforcement took down one of the most significant marijuana grow operations in Arizona history. International traffickers exploited a national park in our own backyard to cultivate thousands of marijuana plants hoping to line their pockets with millions in drug profits. Our eradication means that tons of marijuana never made it to our neighborhoods, and millions of dirty dollars never made it into the drug trade."

The investigation preceding the complaint was conducted by the U.S. Forest Service, the Gila County Violent Crime, Narcotic and Gang Task Force (comprised of the Gila County Sheriff's Office and the Arizona Department of Public Safety), the Coconino County Sheriff's Office, the Flagstaff Police Department, DEA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The prosecution was handled by Steven P. Logan, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix.

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